CONTESTING TRANSLATION

Studies in Honour of Mona Baker

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CHAPTER 4

CONCEPTUAL NARRATIVES OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION AND EPISTEMICIDE

Between Translation Studies and the Cultural History of Science

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4

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John Ødemark

> With very few exceptions, the intimate connection between translation and the mediation of knowledge has received relatively limited attention in translation studies to date, and even less in other areas of the humanities that one would expect […].
>
> (Baker, 2018)

In this chapter, I will use insights from Mona Baker's narrative approach to translation to examine the idea of epistemicide in relation to translation, hybrids, and go-betweens in the history of science, and in the emergent field called the history of knowledge, which relates science to other forms of knowledge, like the humanities and various forms of popular knowledge (Daston, 2017). I understand hybridity as a paradigm that centres on the agency of intermediaries or go-betweens working in cross-cultural contact zones and consider it as a distinct perspective through which to examine situations where epistemicide can occur (Bhabha, 1994; Schaffer et al., 2009; Raj, 2008).

Scholars working in English for academic purposes, translation studies, and the sociology of knowledge have in the last decades introduced the concept of epistemicide to describe the eradication of knowledge that does not conform to the protocols of the dominant knowledge paradigm (Bennett, 2007b; Price, 2023; Santos, 2014, p.92, pp.152–153). Within this area of study, the global spread of English academic writing has been characterized as a "predatory discourse" (Bennett, 2007a). The argument in Bennett's groundbreaking article is that translating academic knowledge from other languages into English involves more than a simple transfer of propositions

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and meaning – it inadvertently also entails reshaping knowledge into a specific form of thinking and text-making. As a result, translation into the dominant language erases culturally unique ways of generating and organizing knowledge in other knowledge traditions, such as Iberian and Italian philology, which are marginalized as an English-based corporate publishing industry increasingly takes control of academic publishing globally (Bennett 2007a; 2007b).

As we shall see in detail below, the idea of the scientific revolution plays a prominent part in foundational texts on epistemicide, which I will consider here (Bennett, 2007a, 2007b; Santos, 2014). This prominence is, however, surprising, since the idea of the scientific revolution and its underlying "grand narrative" has long been contested by scholars in the cultural history of science who have turned their attention to hybridity and the interconnectedness of science, society, and politics (Golinski, 1992; Raj, 2017; Shapin, 1996; Latour, 1993). It is therefore crucial, I contend, to question the dependency of the discourse on epistemicide on this historical master narrative. Besides, invoking Baker's terminology, I believe that this meta-narrative of history, science, and progress hinges upon totalizing assumptions about culture(s) and epistemic paradigms, which leave little space for agency and (internal) cultural differences. I will therefore work towards nuancing the language around epistemicide and the tendency in some discourses to repeat certain standard narratives about science, knowledge, culture, and identity. I aim to do this by incorporating insights from Baker. Firstly, I focus on Baker's narrative approach to translation and knowledge, which provides a descriptive meta-language for the following analysis. By employing Baker's concepts, I examine the tension between two competing narratives in the history of science: one that frames science as a progressive journey towards modernity, beginning with the scientific revolution, and another that views this scientific modernity as a force that undermines traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems. This tension is fundamental, as I will show, to the foundational discussions surrounding epistemicide in Bennett and Santos. I will end this chapter with a brief examination of how Indigenous knowledge has been related to medical knowledge translation (KT) in the World Health Organization (WHO) report answering the following synthesis question: *In what ways do cultural contexts influence the knowledge translation process for health decision-making and what are the implications for policy and practice?* (Engebretsen et al., 2022).

The abbreviation "KT" refers to a variety of scientific practices and research activities bound together by the common goal of "bridging the gap" between science in laboratories and clinical application, and, more generally, putting research-based knowledge into policy and practical care (Ødemark & Engebretsen, 2022). The WHO in Europe commissioned the report to support public health decision-makers in questions concerning culture and

health knowledge. My examination demonstrates that the conceptual narratives underpinning the historiography of science and the discourse on epistemicide also influence medical KT, and the construal of the relation between Indigenous medical systems and biomedicine in current health policy. To understand KT in the asymmetrical power contexts where this relationship operates, I believe we need to adopt concepts of knowledge exchange and epistemicide that transcend clear-cut binaries between cultures, time periods, and systems of knowledge.

Narrative, Translation, and Cultural Identity

Baker has on several occasions criticized the pious construal of translators as good mediators, "enabling communication", and inhabiting an apparently neutral and non-political space between languages and cultures (Baker, 2005, p.9, 2019). In "Narratives in and of Translation", she argues that scholarly discourses about culture, language, and translation generally disregard politics. This is so because these discourses regularly depict "a world in which cultural misunderstanding is unintended, innocent and can be avoided once we are sensitised to cultural difference" (2005, p.4). Furthermore, translation studies and other disciplines concerned with cultural difference, Baker contends, have a commitment to "foreignness" and a habituated dislike for "domesticating" otherness, an inclination that should be resisted by developing a "sensitivity" to difference (2005, p.4, 2007, p.152). Baker has, however, argued – pace Venuti – that reducing the translator's choice to one between foreignizing or domesticating, or minoritizing and majoritizing, also reduces political complexities to a binary game between good and evil (Baker, 2007, p.152). To illustrate this, she shows that foreignization and imperialist identity politics align in "pernicious theories", such as Samuel Huntington's construal of non-commensurable civilizations (2007, p.152, 2006, pp.39ff.). For Baker, Huntington's clash of civilizations is an example of a "disciplinary" and "conceptual narrative" that has "managed to penetrate the public space and shape public narratives during a specific period in history" (2019, p.39). I will show how a disciplinary and conceptual narrative about science as progress and "pre-scientific" worlds as holistic and pure informs certain constructions of epistemicide.

On the issue of cultural identity and agency, Baker maintains that a narrative approach "does not privilege essentialist and reductive categories such as race, gender, ethnicity and religion" but pinpoints the "negotiable nature" of identity (2007, p.152). Consequently, narrative theory "allows us to move beyond the focus on supposedly inherent cultural difference" and an "identity politics" based upon essentialized categories of difference and sameness (2007, p.152). While narrative theory acknowledges that membership in cultural, racial, or religious communities influences translators, it

also acknowledges that "that influence is neither inevitable nor predictable" (2007, p.153).

I maintain that it is crucial to discuss these issues because viewing epistemicide in an all-encompassing way implicitly aligns it with an essentialist view of cultural identity politics. Recent decolonial approaches often critique the concepts of hybridity and the fluid nature of identity, creating significant tension with earlier post-colonial scholarship that focused on political and cultural "contact zones" (Engebretsen & Baker, 2024; Chakrabarty, 2022; Larsen, 2023). This new paradigm of identity, which posits "a priori alterities, counter epistemes, that innately subvert or/and subtend the colonial, the modern, the West, the North, the dominant, and other such dystopian categories-entities" (Dube, 2022, p.18), is also often at odds with anthropology and cultural studies that focused on how "travel and translation" (Clifford, 1997) shaped cultures. Such studies argued that the fixed cultural entities assumed by earlier culture studies and anthropology were in fact produced by scholars who imagined "pure" cultural others living "traditionally" (a priori alterities) outside history and modernity, and had approached their fieldwork with the assumption that the investigated cultures were – or ideally should be – untouched by external influences, as if these communities had never experienced the impacts of colonization or cultural exchange (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). Citing the Marxist anthropologist Eric Wolf, we could sum up the critique of cultural boundedness as follows:

> By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the quality of internally homogenous and externally bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls.
>
> *(Wolf, 1982, p.6)*

In the following, I aim to examine the landscape of translation politics and epistemic struggle, moving beyond simplistic notions of boundedness and the binaries they entail. By deploying Baker's concepts, I will show that a tension between two conceptual and disciplinary narratives in the history of science was fundamental to the first, canonical formulations of epistemicide. More precisely, this tension exists between:

i science – and particularly the "event" of the scientific revolution – viewed as progress towards Western scientific modernity, and
ii the (unfortunate) destruction of traditional and Indigenous forms of knowledge that resulted from the victory of scientific modernity.

Baker's narrative approach to translation and knowledge will be central, both because it provides a language of description – a meta-language – and

because it aligns with the focus on go-betweens and mediators in recent trends in the cultural history of science.

Conceptual Narratives and Epistemic Paradigms

I will begin with the question of inter-cultural brokerage in the history of science. The science historian Kapil Raj turns to go-betweens to break down what he calls the "dichotomous ontology" that uses science as the boundary marker between modern and traditional societies, and between the "West and the Rest" (Raj, 2016, see also Raj 2008, 2013, and 2017). Raj contends that these dichotomous ontologies have been present since the inception of the history of science as a field and goes on to complain about the field's "insularity and reticence to fully incorporate the methods and tools of the anthropologist, a sine qua non for seriously engaging in this kind of research [i.e., the cross-cultural inquiry of science and knowledge formation]" (2016, p.45). Thus, anthropology is called upon as a disciplinary source of approaches able to break down the control of the dichotomous ontology that has governed the history of science. The deconstruction of this dichotomy is urgent, Raj maintains, since "until recently [it has] been widely assumed" that traffic between Europe and its others during colonization took the form of a "*bipartite* relationship between radically different cultural groups, linked at best through a *one-way cultural and scientific diffusionism* from European 'centre' to colonial 'periphery'" (2016, p.45, my emphasis).

The one-directional flow from the West was apparently explained, in the history of science, with reference to the "methodological rigour" of science; not the power of capital or the cultural industry or other homogenizing agents often called upon to explain globalization as the destroyer of all cultural difference. Raj moreover – fully in line with the identification of the binary plot underpinning the history of science – contends that studies of non-Western sciences and knowledge traditions have "resort[ed] to the common, classical methodology of comparativism, which constitutes its objects in contrasting, dualistic, terms, *with clear boundaries between them*", regardless of which historical period or cultural space was under consideration (2016, p.45, my emphasis). This idea of bounded cultures was exactly what hybrid and relational constructions of culture and identity opposed, sometimes in tandem with post-structuralist notions of how texts and textualization produced the "traditional" subjects of cultural inquiry (e.g., Bauman & Briggs, 2003).

My contention, then, is that discourses on epistemicide tend to reproduce the dichotomous ontologies Raj writes about. To further explore this, I need a language of description and analysis that helps me navigate between the dichotomies in question. I find this language in Baker's work, and more precisely in her idea of disciplinary and conceptual narratives. Taking the notion of conceptual narrative from Somers & Gibson, Baker (2005, p.6) adds that

"conceptual narratives may be more broadly defined as the *stories and explanations* that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry" (2005, p.6, my emphasis).

Moreover, such a narrative is "not necessarily traceable to a specific stretch of text but is more likely to underpin a whole range of texts and discourses" (2005, p.5). Hence, Baker's notion of conceptual narrative underpins the narrative nature of scholarly assumptions and prejudices – of scholarly paradigms. The idea of a conceptual narrative in this construal is, we could say, something like a slightly "softer" version of a "paradigm" in the tradition after Thomas Kuhn (see below); it references shared manners of constructing and explaining research objects in the disciplines but underscores that there are various and competing conceptual and disciplinary narratives available. Finally, the notion of a conceptual narrative underscores the temporal nature of data construction and explanation. As we shall see, the two conceptual narratives that have constituted the history of science are based upon two different temporal organizations, one locating value in the past and the other in the future.

Epistemicide and the Scientific Revolution

In this section, I explore the relationship between epistemicide and two conceptual stories in the history of science. My contention is that the tension between these stories is fundamental for the first, canonical formulations of epistemicide. As mentioned, the idea of a "scientific revolution" plays a prominent part in some of the foundational texts on epistemicide in translation studies. According to Bennett,

> The "scientific revolution", as it has come to be known, represented a major shift in attitudes and values. For not only did the focus of knowledge pass from man's (sic) symbolic systems to the outside world, a whole new methodological approach of induction (combining the rational and the empirical) gradually took over from the Aristotelian system of deduction, which had been the basis of university education until then. The copious eloquence and elegant rhetoric valued by the Christian humanists now fell out of fashion, and instead a terse plain style was cultivated as the only appropriate vehicle for the new knowledge (no doubt reflecting the Protestant distrust of ornament and symbols as much as their desire to discover the truth about the world around them).
>
> *(Bennett, 2007a, p.159)*

The forthright retelling of this standard tale is surprising since the story has long been questioned in the history of science. The disciplinary narrative has, we could say, decades ago broken loose from the "public narrative" about science

and modernity (Baker, 2019, p.39). For instance, the ambivalent status of the idea of a scientific revolution is apparent in the following book opening: "There was no such thing as the scientific revolution, and this is a book about it". Thus, Steven Shapin, famously, begins a work entitled *The Scientific Revolution* (1996) by creating an ironic distance between the narrator and the narrated.

Rather than celebrating progress and the gradual discovery of nature, attention in science studies has increasingly been turned to hybridity and the interconnectedness of science, society, and politics – and to ethnographic studies of science making. In a sense, space has trumped time in this research paradigm; ethnography and the scrutiny of local details have come to dominate over the idea of time as the dimension where history can be narrated as the "natural" progress of knowledge (Golinski, 2005). In contrast to these developments, though, Bennett's narrative assumes the standard account of scientific progress. This version of the history of science as development and modernity, then, serves as an eloquent example of a disciplinary narrative that has managed to influence both public discourse and other disciplines during a specific historical period. Moreover, it is this viewpoint that works such as Raj's oppose – by introducing new paradigms and narratives centred on intermediaries, translators, and hybridity, agents that work in the "interstices" (Bhabha, 1994) between cultures and traditions of knowledge.

The Universalist and the Culturalist Narrative

In an article where she pits the new and more inclusive field called the history of knowledge against the history of science, Lorraine Daston asserts that all proponents of the history of science after the second world war,

> were unanimous that the Scientific Revolution of early modern Europe represented a historical transformation of the first magnitude, as great an event as the flowering of ancient Greece or the advent of Christianity, beside which the Renaissance and Reformation were reduced to "mere episodes." Its reverberations were still echoing all over the globe.
>
> *(Daston, 2017, p.134)*

But as we have already seen, this disciplinary and public narrative has been questioned by global and post-colonial studies in history and the history of science. Daston also applies a narrative idiom:

> The classical narrative of the history of science was not just *a* Eurocentric narrative; it was *the* Eurocentric narrative, the one that explained how the West had outstripped the rest by inventing science and thereby winning the modernity sweepstakes.
>
> *(2017, p.134, original italics)*

So far, I have used Baker's narrative categories descriptively. Now, I have come to a place in my argument where I can give the idea of disciplinary and conceptual narrative a more analytical charge. The notion of conceptual narrative enables us to see a relationship between different narrative forms in the history of science (based on Daston's construal). As I have said, my claim is that a tension between two competing conceptual narratives still structures the construal of epistemicide in the foundational texts I examine here. We could call these the universalist narrative and the culturalist narrative. These, moreover, are versions of broader public narratives and "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1973) associated with wider trends such as the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Firstly, there is the *universalist narrative* depicting the victory of scientific modernity. But, alongside this narrative, Daston also presents what we can call the *culturalist narrative*, which is vital for the formulation of epistemicide that I am concerned with here. "Many of the founding narratives that twinned the origins of modern science and of modernity tout court", Daston details, were ambivalent about modernity, and authors who celebrated the triumph of science over superstition also lamented the "eviction notice from the purportedly cozy, human-centered medieval cosmos" (2017, p.136). Thus, a contrastive narrative emerges of humanity's expulsion from a medieval Eden centred around humans (i.e., pre-Copernican anthropocentrism), which is just as foundational as the narrative of triumphant scientific modernity. Thus, we encounter what we can call, with Baker's terminology, two opposed conceptual narratives that have constituted the history of science as a struggle between what Daston calls "teleological modernism" and "sympathetic historicism" (2017, p.138). "Even those who", Daston asserts in another context, "like Bruno Latour, loudly assert 'we have never been modern' take this seventeenth-century moment to be seminal of our characteristic brand of unmodernity" (Daston, 1998, p.149).

On one hand, the historiography of science has traced the rise of modern rationality and science during what it defines as early modernity, a period foreshadowing mature modernity. On the other hand, approaches rooted in sympathetic historicism have contributed to depicting the past as a foreign country – rendering it culturally different from the territory we inhabit now and thus irrelevant for an exploration of our current intellectual landscape. This foreignizing strategy is at the core of sympathetic historicism, and has often assumed some version of a concept of bounded cultures that construed past periods as instances of different "epistemes", "paradigms", or "styles of reasoning" (Ødemark & Engebretsen, 2018, p.87).

This historiographical commitment to the cultural difference of the past requires the identification of an object in the past that differs from the present in a manner analogous to how contemporary cultures differ spatially (Burke, 1997, p.165, 2007). "Sympathetic historicism" thus presents past science as

a separate epistemic culture that should be understood on its own terms, in its own proper context/s, much like anthropologists approach a foreign culture (Latour & Woolgard, 1986; Ødemark & Engebretsen, 2018). It is this approach and its concomitant conceptual narrative that have raised the question of the translatability of knowledge between periods in the history and philosophy of science; for "teleological modernism" the issue of epistemic or cultural translation does not arise since truth is self-explanatory and errors can be accounted for by turning to conceptual narratives in sociology or psychology to explain error as deviation induced by social or psychological factors (e.g., Bloor, 2001).

Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigm is obviously extremely central in the development of sympathetic historicism (Kuhn, 2012). His claim that science is dependent upon shared patterns of thought and exemplary models "has been central to the development of studies of science in and as culture" (Coen, 2012, p.109). Inspired by Kuhn, many inquiries into the translatability and commensurability of knowledge claims from different cultures and periods took bounded cultures and paradigms as the point of departure for comparison and translation. As Coen observes,

> Historians of science since Kuhn have tended to assume that social organizations and social conflicts map neatly onto linguistic groupings. Instead of posing these lines of affiliation and division as historical questions, historians tend to take them as givens. The analysis of translation typically comes to a halt with the evaluation of the distance of the product from the original; the interpretation of the translation within its own context of production is largely neglected. In these ways, the incommensurability thesis has short-circuited much of the hard work of historical research:
>
> *(Coen, 2012, p.111)*

Rather than seeing cultural/linguistic/epistemic identity and difference as the *explananda,* perceived difference has been taken to explain incommensurability and translation problems – in so far as difference (cultural, epistemic etc.) then explains difference (cultural, epistemic etc.); this is obviously also a vicious circle in a logical sense: X think and act as they do because they belong to culture A, which is characterized by the thoughts and actions associated with X.

Coen suggests that Kuhn took monolingualism as the norm and therefore saw "[b]ilingualism" as the "solution to the problem of relativism, the problem raised by [the] theory of incommensurability" (2012, p.109). More recent studies attuned to the mobility of knowledge, however, have radically challenged the Kuhnian assumption of "an essentially confrontational relation between disparate peoples or communities" and moved the attention to "global interconnections" and "forgotten actors, such as captive scholars,

traders, and other cultural and linguistic 'go-betweens'" (2012, p.109). Work on such "go-betweens", moreover, has further underscored that "cross-cultural interaction itself was a constitutive condition for the very possibility of sustained European presence in new and unfamiliar spaces" (Raj, 2025, p.124).

Writing about India, Raj explains that cross-cultural interaction and translation furnished such a condition of possibility because Europeans "were epistemologically dependent upon Indigenous populations in order to accede to the knowledges and practices of the cultures they initially interacted with and progressively colonized" (2023, p.2). Here then, translators and go-betweens are pinpointed as hybrid forces instrumental in establishing boundaries that were later seen as impermeable when people started claiming that the East and the West were incommensurable worlds. Continuing this line of argument, we could say that assertions of untranslatability on a macro level (East/West) depend upon a series of pragmatic "micro-translations". Studies of science and knowledge in translation have thus challenged the assumption of "an essentially confrontational relation between disparate peoples or communities" (see citation above) and the narrative behind sympathetic historicism. They have done this by shifting the focus from macro to micro, from civilizations, cultures, and societies to individual agents and inter-cultural mediators. By doing this, they have also, we could say, constructed a new conceptual narrative that underscores the agency of translators and other go-betweens. This conceptual narrative, then, has aimed to undermine the old story of incommensurability between cultures or paradigms, not by pointing towards universal reason and how progress obliterates traditional forms of knowledge, but by underscoring that a constant work of translation and mediation furnish the infrastructure of our world/s.

Epistemicide and the Narrative of Culture

I will now return to the notion of epistemicide and relate it to the conceptual narrative of incommensurable paradigms construed as bounded wholes. Once again, I will quote a short stretch from a foundational text, this time Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who in *Epistemologies of the South* defines "epistemicide", as "the murder of knowledge" (2017, p.93). Next, he adds:

> Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it. — In the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide.
>
> *(2017, p.93)*

The cited passage constructs a series of equivalences: knowledge equals culture which equals social groups. Moreover, a form of "knowledge death" appears to be the inevitable consequence of all "unequal exchange". Indeed, the figures of murder and death show the seriousness of this theme. The link in the cited passage between epistemicide and genocide further cements this. However, it is surely not the case that asymmetrical cultural contact always kills all knowledge in a suppressed culture, as dominated and non-hegemonic knowledge in many cases can survive in the margins, as in the case of the Indigenous forms of knowledge described in the last section of this chapter.

The following construal of epistemicide also illustrates a lack of differentiation between culture, knowledge, and social groups. In this case, it has to do with the assumption about what a discourse is and how it works:

> A discourse colonizes the social world imperialistically, from the point of view of one institution. When the discourse in question is a vehicle of knowledge, […], then […] territorial expansion […] amounts to 'epistemicide'. This sounds nasty – and indeed it is, as we realize when we stop to think about it. For the way that a particular culture formulates its knowledge is intricately bound up with the very identity of its people, their way of making sense of the world and the value system that holds that worldview in place. Epistemicide, as the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge, is at its worst nothing less than symbolic genocide.
>
> *(Bennett, 2007a, p.154)*

In this passage, it seems that discourses naturally and essentially aim at epistemic monoculture, that they just have a teleological drive towards the colonization of other approaches to knowledge. The phrasing here, however, must also imply that there are many discourses contending for control over the same territory. For discourses are expressions of institutions aiming for expansion. These, then, are internal colonizations. As such, the definition of discourse appears to be in a certain tension with the conceptualization of culture in the cited passage. The knowledge of a "particular culture" is unified (encompassing "*its* knowledge", in the singular). This knowledge, moreover, is "bound up with the very identity of *its* people", and their – also apparently uniform – "way of making sense of the world", which again rests upon *the* unified "value system that holds *that* worldview in place".

If there are institutions and discourse, there will also be attempts of epistemicide and colonization, since this is the totalitarian nature of discourses – which is the claim about the nature of discourse presented here. This assumption, however, will inevitably also imply that the destruction of other forms of knowledge is also the ordinary mode of all discourses (even a discourse on epistemicide). Hence, we have here a certain "naturalizing" of "epistemic" predation by discourse that both *depoliticizes* epistemicide (discourse *is*

predatory) and *totalizes* it (it happens to cultural wholes). As a function of the lethal nature of discourses, epistemicide must happen, and since it happens to cultural wholes ("value system that holds that worldview in place"), the destruction will apparently be total.

This manner of construing epistemicide appears to reinstate the dichotomous ontology critiqued by Raj and replicate what Coen called the idea of knowledge exchange as "an essentially confrontational relation between disparate peoples or communities" (see citations above). If it pinpoints the violence and destruction associated with epistemicide, it also inserts people and social groups – Huntington-like – into closed circles called cultures. Culture is thus also a destiny; it is the limit of a person's ability to act and think "authentically", to be a part of a larger whole, and still have a cultural *identity*. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, the idea that discourses are linked to specific institutions and vie with other institutions and discourses for epistemic dominance clearly implies that cultures and societies inherently contain diverse forms of knowledge.

Conceptual Narratives and the Translation of Indigenous Knowledge

I have shown that the conceptual narratives associated with "teleological modernism" and "sympathetic historicism" shaped the discourse on epistemicide. As we shall see, these conceptual narratives also influence the literature on medical KT and how that literature constructs Indigenous medicine and KT in contrast to biomedicine.

To illustrate, I now turn to how Indigenous knowledge has been related to medical KT in the WHO report answering the following synthesis question: *In what ways do cultural contexts influence the knowledge translation process for health decision-making and what are the implications for policy and practice?* (Engebretsen et al., 2022). I was a co-author of this report, and the following discussion is a further reflection on how marginalized cultures are and can be cited in such policy documents. To understand KT in relation to Indigenous medicine, I maintain, we need to go beyond clear-cut binaries between cultures, paradigms, and systems of knowledge.

The report was commissioned by the WHO in Europe to assist public health decision-makers. It is intended to help them "use the best available evidence in their own decision-making" and thus "ensure links between evidence, health policies, and improvements in public health" (Engebretsen et al., 2022, p.i). Additionally, it summarized how KT and cultural contexts could be conceptualized and utilized for policy purposes. Standard models of KT take translation and knowledge transmission as a given and accordingly downplay the complexity of translation as an entangled material, textual, and cultural process, which inevitably affects the "original scientific

message" (Ødemark & Engebretsen, 2022). The report consequently represents an official attempt, warranted by the WHO, to go beyond the standard model of KT.

Basically, the report argued that KT takes place within cultural frameworks that powerfully shape what policy problems are and what type of research is accepted by policymakers. This was illustrated with studies from the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the use of face masks across cultures, questions of KT and evidence-informed decision-making arising from the *Black Lives Matter* movement, as well as examples of KT in Indigenous cultures. A conclusion was that effective KT within local cultural contexts requires going beyond general categories, assumptions, and what we now can call conceptual stories about general types of culture (Indigenous, traditional, modern).

The starting point for the report was a literature review of peer-reviewed studies published from 2005 to 2020.[1] Ultimately, 101 documents were included in the qualitative synthesis. In 79 of the included papers, "culture" was framed in terms of "otherness" (to science, modernity, the West). Specifically, 38 papers addressed minorities, 28 focused on Indigenous cultures, and 14 examined local settings. The review further demonstrated that Indigenous people are regularly seen as a cultural other to which it is difficult to accommodate evidence-based knowledge. Indigenous medical systems, moreover, were also consistently identified through comparison with, and as the opposite of, an ideal typical depiction of Western science – much like in Raj's polar ontology. An illustrative case in point is Smylie et al. (2004, p.141), one of the reviewed articles, which presents the binaries found in much of the literature we reviewed for the report (and is itself based upon a literature review). Below (see Figure 4.1) is my schematic summary of the polarities in what Smylie et al. call a "dichotomous framework" that separates Indigenous knowledge systems from Western science (2004, p.141).

We notice that the terms employed are relational, and employing the conventional contrast between tradition and modernity to describe opposing epistemic and medical systems. Thus, this table, and its binary logic, reproduces the conceptual narratives I claimed influenced the discourse on epistemicide.

Moreover, in the literature reviewed for the report, Indigenous culture was regularly associated with what biomedicine or science *lack*, the ecological or cultural holism from which science has become estranged, and which "sympathetic historicism" recreated in the conceptual narrative that served as the opposite to the story of modernity and science (Engebretsen et al., 2022, pp.24–27). A case in point is Finn & O'Fallon (2017), who maintain that Indigenous knowledge and so-called tribal ecological knowledge (TEK) foreshadow and overlap with concepts like "exposome" (the environmental exposures an individual encounter throughout life and how these affect

TABLE 4.1 Dichotomous framework that opposes Indigenous knowledge systems to Western science

Indigenous knowledge	*Western science*
Contextual	Universal
Ecological/holistic	Reductionist/linear
Relational	Objective
Pluralistic	Hierarchical
Timeless/infinite	Static/temporal
Communal	Singular
Oral	Written

Smylie et al. (2004, p.142); see also Engebretsen et al. (2022, pp.24–27).

health) and notions that health has social determinants (SDoH). If "the concepts of the exposome and SDoH overlap with definitions of TEK", however,

> the exposome does not take into account the spiritual and cultural aspects underlying health that are so central to TEK. In addition, although SDoH do encompass spiritual and cultural beliefs, Western scientific research on SDoH continues to grapple with measuring the social dimensions of health and with fully incorporating qualitative data on nonbiological influences on health. In addition, SDoH research may or may not explore the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and biological factors as TEK frameworks allow.
>
> *(Finn & O'Fallon, 2017)*

Hence, various holistic approaches and concepts recently developed in (Western) science to supplement the biocentrism of Western medicine are already found in Indigenous traditions. As Jacques Derrida claimed, "non-recognition of the other" can take the form of "love" just as well as hate, as when cultural others are thought to have all the cultural holism "fallen" modernity lacks (Derrida, 1976).

The othering of Indigenous and traditional culture, however, also has a far more sombre side. Ethnographers have documented a long history where Indigenous peoples have been seen as "uncultivated" and "superstitious" disseminators of disease. C. Briggs and C. Mantini-Briggs have, for example, shown how an outbreak of cholera in Venezuela was attributed to the perceived culinary habit of the Warao people eating crabs. Crabs became "the rhetorical anchor for far-ranging attempts to link cholera to the '*custom*' and '*culture*' of *indígenas*" (Briggs & Mantini-Briggs, 2003, p.201, my emphasis). This linkage, then, between crab eating and an Indigenous culture, represents a holism turned vicious, where assumed practices and the cultural whole they are seen as forming a part of are said to spread disease.

Indigenous KT, is, more often than not, played out in colonial contexts such as the one described by Briggs and Mantini-Briggs, where health issues are the product of a long history of oppression that shape everyday life. In such contexts, current health issues are, in the words of Morton Ninomiya (also reviewed for the report), the "*cumulative* effect of colonization through settlement, church-based schooling, child welfare, racism, and loss of subsistence living" (2020, p.224, my emphasis). Another illustrative case in point is how Indigenous knowledge about plants patented for Western medicine has been taken without consent or compensation, often at enormous profit (Ezeanya, 2013). In these last examples, Indigenous health systems are not merely cultural wholes or polar oppositions to "Western" biomedicine; they are neither barriers to KT nor reservoirs of timeless, traditional knowledge. To translate and relate to local contexts, and to identify mechanisms for integrating local, cultural contexts in KT, we have to go beyond general categories (like "Indigenous culture") with only a relational reference (like the non-Indigenous). To conceptualize KT in such an asymmetrical context, we consequently also need notions of knowledge exchange and epistemicide that transcend binaries between cultures, periods, and knowledge systems.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the interplay between translation politics and epistemicide. By employing Baker's narrative approach to translation and knowledge, I explored the tension between two competing conceptual narratives in the history of science: one construing science as a progressive journey towards modernity beginning with the scientific revolution, and the other viewing scientific modernity as a force that inevitably – albeit regrettably – erases traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems. I demonstrated that this tension is fundamental to the canonical formulations of epistemicide.

This examination also revealed that the conceptual narratives underpinning the historiography of science influence medical KT and the perceived relationships between Indigenous medical systems and biomedicine in current health policies. Moreover, I have shown that a new conceptual narrative, which focuses on the agency of translators and other go-betweens, has been deployed to undermine the old story of incommensurability between cultures or paradigms by pinpointing how it is the work of translation that constitutes the problematic of cultural and epistemic incommensurability in the tradition after Kuhn. This last conceptual story, I believe, could be fruitfully used to rethink epistemicide and KT in asymmetrical contexts.

Note

1 Many of the studies briefly mentioned culture and/or knowledge translation (KT) while focusing on other topics. Several key papers were not captured by the formal search strategy. To gain a deeper understanding of the field, the literature

was later supplemented with a hermeneutic review, which involved close reading of essential texts. In the English search, a total of 1,368 documents were found after removing duplicates, which was reduced to 175 for full-text screening using inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify papers on KT and culture in a health context (Engebretsen et al., 2022).

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